Secret witness tip leads cops to loot

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A "complete and sound case" for prosecution in the second Chicago murder mystery to be solved by The SUN-TIMES $100,000 "Secret Witness" plan was announced by the state's attorney's office.

The announcement came after investigators found, in a pawn shop at 309 S. Clark St., two rings and a watch stolen by the slayers of John Onesto, 72, in his cobbler shop at 2103 Taylor St.

The jewelry had been pawned by John Groth, 21, one of four young men charged with the murder after being named in secret information supplied by SUN-TIMES readers.

$5,000 to be paid

A $5,000 reward for the information will be paid by this newspaper, upon conviction of the killers.

Another reward of the same amount will be paid, on conviction, for tips that brought solution last week of the murder of Herman Engelhard.

Related stories on pages 11, 12 and 13.

Capt. Daniel Gilbert, chief investigator for the state's attorney, gave full credit to The SUN-TIMES "Secret Witness" plan for solving both the Onesto and Engelhard murders.

He said in discussing recovery of the Onesto jewelry:

"That is the 'wrap-up' in this one. The jewelry will be corroborative evidence for the two confessions we already have in the murder."

He added that relatives of two fugitives, Groth and Chris [redacted], 17, had promised him the two youths would surrender soon. The confessions have been obtained from Vito Zaccagnini and John Barbaro, each 22, who testified before the [redacted] and jury.

Pawned Jan. 15

The [redacted] S. Clark St. pawn shop owner, Julius Gunther, turned the Onesto jewelry over to Sgt. Nick Disteldorf and Det. Walter Rusing. It consisted of a 17-jewel wrist watch, an onyx ring with the initial "J" and a yellow gold ring with a diamond and onyx setting.

Gunther's records showed Groth pledged the valuables, claiming them for his own, last Jan. 15, and obtained $14.

"He came in two weeks ago and tried to sell me the stuff outright for another $5," Gunther recalled. "I turned him down because I am overstocked."

Capt. Gilbert said his men recovered the jewelry after

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Find loot in 'secret tip' case

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getting the pawn ticket for it from a girl acquaintance of Groth. He asked newspapers to withhold the girl's name because she would be an important witness at the murder trial.

He said the girl told of getting the pawn ticket from Groth's mother, Mrs. Elsie Price, 3145 Lituanica Ave., last Sunday. He said the girl told him:

"Mrs. Price asked me to get the stuff out of pawn and destroy it the first thing Monday morning. I didn't do it, because I thought she was just overly excited."

The jewelery had been pawned legally and it was registered with proper authorities by the pawn shop owner.

Asst. State's Atty. Edward Finnegan said the jewelry would be identified as Onesto's by his son and by other persons. "Against that evidence, the confessions can hardly be recanted," he pointed out.

A gag stuffed into his mouth during a robbery on June 17, 1948, killed Onesto and 11 months later, last May 14, The SUN-TIMES published a case history of the murder--pointing out that "somebody knows" who slew the old man.

Clues mailed

Somebody did know. Information was sent to Postoffice Box 3444, Chicago 77, Ill., the destination to which all clue letters should be mailed. That information led to solution of a mystery that had baffled investigators for nearly a year.

On these "Secret Witness" clues, Barbaro was the first man arrested by the state's attorney's office.

He told Asst. State's Atty. Finnegan of being approached by Zaccagnini with a proposal for robbing Onesto, reputed to have saved up a large sum to return to Italy to visit his family.

Barbaro said he turned Zaccagnini down, but put him in touch with Groth and Lissalo.

Next arrested was Zaccagnini who admitted being the robbery leader. He said he did not enter the shop--because Onesto knew him--until after Groth and Lissalo had bound, gagged and blindfolded the old man.

Cheated leader

They also took most of the $600 loot, and cheated Zaccagnini by giving him only 16 silver dollars as his share.

The SUN-TIMES is, of course, keeping secret all informant's letters, unsigned by the senders. That policy is being followed strictly in the Onesto and Engelhard cases, and will be in all others.

Informants are instructed to save carefully the jagged pieces torn from the last pages of their letters, containing six numerals used instead of a regular signature.

Rules for submitting clues are published each Saturday in The SUN-TIMES and also may be obtained at the Readers Service office in The SUN-TIMES Bldg 211 W. Wacker Dr.

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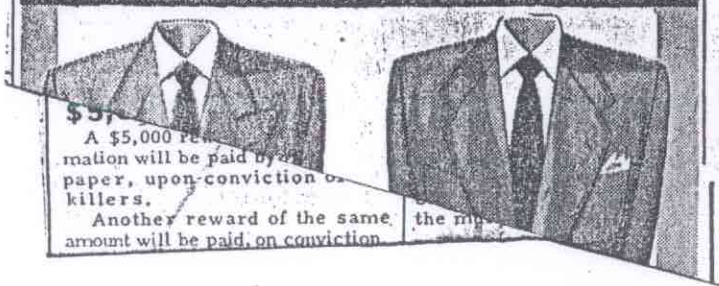

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